Thomas Hobbes and John Locke are pre-Enlightenment thinkers, yet their ideologies influence the ensuing period of Enlightenment, also known as the “Age of Reason.” Human beings are considered rational creatures capable of employing reason and logic in order to solve pressing questions of the time and a spirit of inquiry pervades society. People rely on the theory of natural law, which states that the alignment and organization of the planets suggests that there are also logical laws for humanity. Observation of nature, in combination with reason, will reveal these laws and human beings can reform society accordingly. Although both Hobbes and Locke influence the period of Enlightenment, the two have drastically different views regarding natural law, mankind’s natural characteristics, and the purpose and structure of government.

The ideologies of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke differ with regard to natural law. Hobbes states that there are two drastically opposing facets that encompass his view of the laws of nature. He says that the first law of nature is to “seek peace, and follow it,” but, if this advice does not prove advantageous for mankind, the second law of nature says that by any means necessary, mankind must “defend ourselves” from the rest of the population through violence. Locke, on the other hand, states that natural law presupposes that all humans are created equal and independent, which reveals “no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions.” Resorting to violence is not acceptable behavior for mankind unless an individual’s freedom is in danger of being relinquished.

|  |
| --- |
|  |

Hobbes and Locke not only disagree with regard to natural law, their views on mankind’s natural characteristics differ as well. Hobbes feels that mankind is "self interested" and that life “is a condition of war of every one against every one.” Man is constantly in opposition with others due to petty jealousies and lack of trust for one another. Man left alone in nature creates war and governments need to be employed in order to maintain a sense of community in society. In opposition, Locke’s views of mankind is extremely optimistic because he feels that the “natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior being on earth.” As long as mankind maintains a sense of freedom in society, peace will prevail among human beings.

The purpose and structure of government reveals another distinction between the ideologies of Hobbes and those of Locke. Hobbes states that nature is a state of war and that government is essential because it pulls society away from the natural state. Hobbes feels that mankind will never be able to use reasoning faculties in order to solve pressing problems of the time unless they are forced to form societies governed by an absolute ruler. This ruler does not govern under the “Divine Right” theory, but remains in a power position as long as the station can be maintained through force and intimidation. Locke disagrees with Hobbes because he feels that nature is freedom and that governments are employed in order to preserve nature. He states that governments need to break away from rule by “absolute, arbitrary power” and switch to democratic governments, or rule by the majority. Monarchies deny freedom to mankind; freedom of one’s individual self is what characterizes mankind throughout Locke’s writings. No one has the right to govern anyone else’s body without the willing consent and approval of the individual, which occurs in the form of suffrage.

The tenets behind the arguments espoused from Thomas Hobbes and John Locke differ substantially regarding natural law, mankind’s natural characteristics, and the purpose and structure of government. With regard to natural law, Hobbes feels that human beings are constantly engaging in violent acts against one another, whereas Locke states that violence is not acceptable due to the freedom given to individuals. In reference to the natural characteristics of mankind, Hobbes states that mankind is evil and constantly in opposition with the rest of mankind, unlike Locke, who maintains a sense of optimism regarding man’s interactions with each other. Finally, Hobbes and Locke differ regarding their views of government because Hobbes believes in accepting a ruler with absolute control over the population, whereas Locke insists on democratic governments that do not deny freedom to individuals within society.